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ABSTRACT

Surprisingly little research has studied the relationship of sex roles and marital adjustment, although one would assume these variables would be related. In addition, no significant relationships have been found between androgyny and marital satisfaction. To study the relationship of sex roles, particularly androgyny, to marital adjustment, 55 couples completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. Results showed that androgynous couples had the highest marital adjustment, followed by sex-typed couples. Undifferentiated couples had the lowest adjustment level. Results suggest a transcendence of the individual to the marital unit, and imply that a full complement of masculine and feminine traits is important for marital satisfaction. (Author/JAC)

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The Relationship of Sex Roles and Marital Adjustment

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The Relationship of Sex Roles and Marital Adjustment

Considerable recent research (Bem, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976; Lorr & Manning, 1978) has focused on the relative psychological adjustment of persons classified as androgynous, masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated by sex role tests. According to Sandra Bem's (1977) formulation, masculinity and femininity are scored as separate constructs rather than as a single bipolar dimension. This method provides each person with both a masculine and a feminine score.

Androgynous persons are those high on qualities of both masculinity and femininity. Masculine persons are high on masculinity and low on femininity, while the reverse is true for feminine persons. Undifferentiated persons are those who are low on both masculinity and femininity.

Sex roles measured in this manner, that is with masculinity and femininity as separate entities, have been related to personality traits, role behavior, psychological adjustment, and other variables. These reports show androgynous persons generally to be the most flexible and psychologically healthy individuals, presumably because they have a greater behavioral repertoire than those in the other groups. Undifferentiated persons typically exhibit the most psychological deficits, and sex-typed persons tend to fall between these two extremes.

Surprisingly, very little research has studied the relationship of sex roles and marital adjustment, although one would

intuitively assume that these variables would be highly interrelated. Research that has been conducted in this area has not produced clear results.

Burger and Jacobson (1979) directly related sex roles to marital satisfaction, and found femininity to be positively related to marital adjustment in both sexes. Androgyny was not related to adjustment as the authors had hypothesized. These authors considered a couple to be androgynous if only one of the partners were androgynous. However, it could be argued that a couple would be more likely to experience discord rather than satisfaction when one member is androgynous and one sex-typed. In a study by Pederson (1977), however, sex-typed/androgynous married pairs reported higher adjustment and communication levels than androgynous/androgynous couples. In a third study, by Barnett and Nietzel (1979), no statistical differences were found in marital satisfaction on the basis of sex role.

None of the studies reported here used the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1981), although it is the most widely used and most extensively validated of the current sex role measures.

The purpose of the present study was to relate sex roles, particularly androgyny, to marital adjustment. Specifically, in this research, 55 married couples completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959). Subjects were largely white and middle class. Husbands' ages ranged from 22 to 56, with a mean of 34,

while wives' ages ranged from 22 to 55 with a mean of 31. Mean length of marriage was 9 years, and ranged from 1 to 35 years.

Prior to undertaking the study, specific hypotheses had been generated from past findings that predicted that sex role combinations would fall in the following order of descending adjustment: androgynous-androgynous, androgynous-feminine, masculine-feminine, masculine-androgynous, and one or both partners undifferentiated. However, the data could not be analyzed in this manner due to the small number of subjects in certain groups. For example, there were only four androgynous-androgynous couples in the sample.

An alternative method of classifying couples' sex role scores was then developed by the author. Couples' sex role scores were collapsed so that each couple was treated as a sex-role unit. Specifically, for this analysis the masculinity scores of the two members of the pair were summed, as were the two femininity scores. That way, each couple had a single masculine score and a single feminine score. Medians were calculated on these collapsed masculine and feminine scores, and each couple's sex role orientation was determined by the median split method. For example, if the combined scores of the couple were each above their respective medians, the couple was classified as androgynous.

By this method, 13 couples were classified as androgynous, 16 as masculine, 15 as feminine, and 11 as undifferentiated. Because no predictions were made of the greater importance of

either masculinity or femininity in marital satisfaction, the masculine and feminine groups were combined into a 31 member sex-typed group.

Although the terms androgynous, sex-typed, and undifferentiated do not seem to be particularly apt when used to refer to couples, the terms were retained in order to maintain consistency with past sex role research and to thereby avoid confusion.

It was predicted that androgynous couples would show the highest marital adjustment, with sex-typed couples intermediate, and undifferentiated couples the lowest in adjustment. A marital adjustment score for each couple was computed by summing the individual Locke-Wallace scores of the two spouses.

The mean Locke-Wallace scores for the sex role groups were as follows: androgynous couples, 232.23 (SD = 31.13); sex-typed couples, 219.99 (SD = 33.57); undifferentiated couples, 194.45 (SD = 56.33). A one-way analysis of variance corrected for unequal n's (Keppel, 1973), showed significant differences among the means (F (2,52) = 3.60, $p < .05$). These differences were in the predicted direction.

These results suggest a new way of looking at marital satisfaction; namely, that it is the sex role characteristics of the marital unit, a blending of the traits of the individuals within the couple that is important, rather than each individual's traits as such. A transcendence of the individual to the marital unit is suggested.

Androgynous couples are those who, between the two spouses, demonstrate high levels of both masculine and feminine qualities; individually, members of these pairs can have varying degrees of masculine and feminine characteristics. Masculine couples are high on traits such as instrumentality, but low on such feminine traits as expressiveness that are important for a happy marriage. Feminine couples show expression, but are lower on such characteristics as assertiveness and leadership abilities. Undifferentiated couples are low in both of these areas. Androgynous couples, then, are those who provide the full complement of sex role characteristics; it appears that couples are more satisfied when the full range of sex role traits is represented within their marriage.

These results must be considered tentative until substantiated by further research. Research in this area is ongoing at the present time, and preliminary results support the findings that have been reported here.

Even in their current status, the present findings point up the importance of considering married couples as units rather than as a collection of two persons. This Gestaltist finding, that in marriages, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, may be important in other areas as well as in the area of sex roles.

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